



WATER COMPETENCY/SAFETY POLICY

WHAT: Water competency means being able to anticipate, avoid, and survive common drowning situations, as well as being able to recognize and provide assistance to those in need. It includes water safety awareness and helping others.

WHY: Drowning is a major cause of accidental death. Drowning is a surprisingly fast, often silent injury. A weak or non-swimmer who stumbles and loses footing when unable to touch the bottom, can quickly start to drown. The person who is in trouble cannot move a few feet to safety and is unable to call for help. They may sink out of sight within seconds. Rescue needs to happen quickly so that the person can breathe and survive without brain damage. Fortunately, drowning situations can be avoided with good planning and being prepared. All TSP children need close and direct supervision. Even those with good swimming skills may not be safe due to conditions and other factors.

WATER SMARTS: There is more to drowning prevention than swimming skills. Water safety is knowing about the water and the hazards in it and about having respect for the water. A person can learn to recognize and avoid some common water hazards like rip currents at beaches that carry a swimmer away from shore and underwater dangers like logs or sea life that sting, bite, snag, or trap swimmers. Water safety is also practicing safe behaviors and stopping unsafe behaviors, like horseplay or diving headfirst into shallow water that can lead to spinal injuries, or consuming alcohol or drugs that can affect judgement, swimming ability, and physical reaction. Water safety includes understanding the layers of protection needed to keep ourselves and our loved ones safer when in, on, and around water. For example, wearing a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket appropriate for their weight and water activity, and putting one on a weak or non-swimmer swimmer, adds a layer of protection. Water competency includes having sufficient knowledge to be responsible for one's own safety as well as the safety of everyone you are supervising. Parents and caregivers should gain basic water safety knowledge and then set rules, coach their children, and closely supervise those not old enough to recognize and avoid hazards, dangerous situations, and risky behaviors.

The American Red Cross recommendations for water competency suggests assessing minimum swim skills for common water environments. Minimum proficiency to control breathing, float or tread water, turn in the water and swim 25 yards using any type of stroke. Anyone lacking these skills should be closely supervised, stay in shallow water and wear a life jacket.



HELPING OTHERS: Everyone should always swim with general supervision such as 1 water watchers. Children without basic swimming skills should be directly supervised by a water watcher who is within arm's reach. Knowledgeable, attentive, supervision of all swimmers is important for drowning prevention and response, particularly for toddlers, children, and teens, even when lifeguards are on duty. Supervision may be provided by designated water watchers such as parents and youth leaders who are alert, not distracted (reading, using a smart device or phone), not using alcohol or drugs, and focused on those near or in the water.

Safe, simple rescue techniques include reaching and throwing a flotation aid from the water's edge without entering the water. However, more skills may be needed to aid someone in trouble in the water. A toddler, or anyone else, on the bottom of a backyard pool needs immediate help from someone trained to safely enter the water, submerge to the victim, remove the victim from the water, and perform CPR. A victim struggling after stepping off a hidden ledge in a lake may be beyond reaching or easy throwing distance from shore. A competent swimmer with appropriate training should be able to safely wade or swim close enough to the victim to push a flotation aid for them to grab. Rescue and first aid skills are especially important for parents whose children swim in backyard pools or recreate in other aquatic settings where lifeguards are not present.

WATER COMPETENCY COMPONENTS

HELPING OTHERS

- Always provide close and constant attention to anyone (children, teens, & adults) you are supervising in or near the water.
- Know how to recognize a drowning person
- Learn SAFE ways to assist others who are in trouble
- Learn CPR (both chest compressions & rescue breaths) and first aid

WATER SMARTS

- Know your limitations: respect the water and avoid unsafe behaviors
- Never swim alone, swim with lifeguards and/or water watchers present
- Swim only in a safe area, free from underwater hazards, including drop-offs, with safe entry and exit points
- Do not dive into shallow or unclear water; enter feet first.
- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket while boating, regardless of swimming skill
- Understand how physical fitness, medical conditions, and cold water change risk factors
- Do not swim while using alcohol or drugs
- Understand the dangers of hyperventilation and hypoxic blackout⁷
- Understand how currents affect swimming in a river



- Know how to recognize, avoid, and handle ocean rip currents
- Know how to call for help

SWIMMING SKILLS

- Step or jump into water over the head and return to the surface
 - Turn around and orient to safety as well as turn over
 - Float or tread water
 - Combine breath control with all swim skills, including forward movement in the water
 - Basic skill: swim to safety for at least 25 yards*
 - Advanced skill: Swim at least 100 yards using relaxed, restful strokes *
 - Exit the water
 - Perform all the skills above while clothed
- *Note: Longer distances and length of times are necessary for competency in different water environments

1. Keeping Kids Safe In and Around Water – Exploring Misconceptions that Lead to Drowning. July 2016, Safe Kids Worldwide www.safekids.org/water-safety
2. Quan L, Bennett E, Moran K, Bierens J. Use of a consensus-based process to develop international guidelines to decrease recreational open water drowning deaths. *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*. 50(3) (2012): 135-144.
3. Scientific Advisory Council Answers – Water Competency. <https://www.instructorscorner.org/s/science>
4. What is Water Competency? American Red Cross- YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOcSRv2Xj5s
5. Simple Safety Steps Series: Never leave a child unattended in or near the water. January 17, 2017, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission www.poolsafely.gov/simple-safety-steps-series-never-leave-a-child-unattended-in-or-near-the-water/